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THE DREW LAB AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

ECOLOGY, EVOLUTION AND CONSERVATION OF CORAL REEFS

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This one matters to me

Twitter is a great medium for people to communicate, but it's short character limit, the sheer volume of tweets and the frequent lack of context can mean that conversations on twitter tend to go from 0 to full on Rage mode in 3.5 seconds. I typically try to stay out of these. I recognize that being in a position of privilege I can pick and choose which battles I engage in and which ones I ignore. This one I can't ignore. This one matters to me.

Briefly, a scientist and blogger at Scientific American whom I respect, Dr. DN Lee declined an offer to write, for free, at Biology Online, a blog that has an affiliation with Scientific American. She was subsequently called a whore. In an email. By people at Biology Online. For not wanting to produce content for them for free.

Dr. Lee is one of the few black women blogging about biology, and she lends an incredibly intelligent voice to our conversations on urban ecology, mammalogy and evolutionary biology. Biology Online's response to her is inexcusable and reprehensible. Being a blogger, she composed a cogent and well thought out response to this and posted it on her [blog](#), hosted by Scientific American. Scientific American, rather than supporting its bloggers, *the people who provide them content* sided with the business partner and pulled Dr. Lee's piece, claiming that it 'verged into the personal' and that because the piece is out in other places that are more appropriate to read it.

For more details about this and for nuanced responses by people who are more articulate than I am please see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). I think that there are some very real conversations that need to be had about the implicit sexism and racism, which Dr. Lee faced. However, while I certainly lend my voice to those decrying Biology Online's incomprehensible response, I want to instead look at Scientific American's response in the context of what it means for my students.

I spend a lot of time during the year working with amazing students and helping them navigate how to find their own voices as beginning graduate students. As it so happens conservation biology tends to skew pretty heavily towards female graduate students, and in this year's class all of the students (N=14) are women. **This means that on both a personal, and on a professional level, it is my business to make sure that women in science have their voices heard and respected.** When Scientific American says that it is does not stand by one of its own, that when a black woman says that the way she is being treated is unfair, that when a woman in science is silenced by the very institutions which are there to support her, when these things happen my students are directly and negatively impacted.

One of the major goals for my students throughout their first year set of classes is learning how to "own the narrative of your science." Doing this requires students to think critically about the hypotheses that they are testing, how their science exists in a broader intellectual landscape and how they can advocate for themselves and their research as young (female) scientists. These are not easy tasks under the best of circumstances. My students are forced to use a variety of social media and web 2.0 tools to learn and to communicate their findings. For example I will soon be running a quiz for my Ichthyology class where students must explore the holdings of the American Museum of Natural History and tweet me the answers to the quiz. We bring in experts in podcasting and crowdsourcing into class so that the students are equipped to be scientists in the early 21st century. I teach an entire class on science communication so that they can see the variety of stages which exist for them to tell their stories.

I have my students become active on twitter because I have found an amazingly smart and supportive community there. I have my students blog, because I feel it is important to be able to communicate outside of peer reviewed literature. I have my students think about alternative careers besides being canalized into doing a Ph.D. Postdoc Tenure Track position because there is more to science for that.

When Scientific American does what it does, it pulls the rug out from under me. It limits my students' opportunities and it shows that we still have a long, tough and important march ahead of us. **Don't mess with my students. This is why this one matters.**

[UPDATE: Mariette DiChristina Editor in Chief at Scientific American more fully explains her response [here](#). I'm not pleased, but I'm willing to take her at

her word for now that they are going to use this opportunity to improve]

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BY LABROIDES IN UNCATEGORIZED ON OCTOBER 13, 2013.

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2 Comments

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OCTOBER 14, 2013 AT 9:36 PM

[...] This post is mostly inside baseball among blog people, but it's an important topic that I don't want to ignore. It's an incident that I kind-of observed unfold from the sidelines, and now it's emerging in the mainstream media, or whatever BuzzFeed is, and will continue to grow. I've always thought of this blog as a blog-for-people-who-don't-read blogs, and there is a lot of sound and fury among blogs that amounts to little that I try to not address. But, as has been pointed out, this one matters. [...]

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OCTOBER 19, 2013 AT 8:49 PM

[...] of Dr. Lee. Some incredibly powerful writing on this subject was found here, here, here, here and here. Eventually Scientific American restored Dr. Lee's post with an apology. In the interim, some [...]

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